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Community News

STATE

**DHR Leadership Charts the Course for the
Next Two Years**

This fall the DHR leadership team held an intensive planning session at the Maritime Institute. The Secretary determined that as we approach a new year, this is a good time for the team to sharpen the focus of DHR's mission.

The Secretary emphasized that, as "One DHR," each administration and local department plays a vital role children's lives. We recognize that the work that each of DHR's five administrations does impacts the well-being of Maryland's kids. Many of our families have more than one need, therefore our core programs work together to serve people, so it is the constellation of efforts working in harmony that meets the needs of children.

The Social Service Administration will be the lead in this effort, using the Program Improvement Plan (PIP) as the foundation for transforming child welfare in Maryland. To that end, a presentation was made regarding the PIP by Donna Hornsby, of the Social Service Administration. The federal government completed its review of our child welfare system earlier this year. Like every state, we were required to submit a program improvement plan, detailing how we will improve our systems to achieve better outcomes. This PIP will serve as a road map for child welfare improvements over the next two years.

The Program Improvement Plan is:

- *Realistic*
- *"Do-able"*
- *Negotiated with Federal partners*
- *Representative of systemic change*
- *Integrated with other on-going initiatives*

The Secretary invited Dr. Susan Orr, Associate Commissioner of the Children's Bureau under the Administration on Children, Youth, and Families. Dr. Orr spoken on trends in Child Welfare, the increased news coverage of child welfare issues as well as how other states have done with their PIPs.

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Blair Named Deputy Secretary

“From the very beginning, Floyd Blair has been fully engaged in the overall process of moving the Baltimore City department forward – even in the midst of continuing controversy around his tenure,” said Secretary Christopher J. McCabe. “As a result, several positive changes have occurred at Baltimore City DSS. Governor Ehrlich and I have always known that Mr. Blair is the right choice for Director of the BCDSS. His track record over the short time he has served as Interim Director supports that fact. He has always had our unequivocal support, and I want to extend my heartfelt appreciation to him for meeting head-on the many challenges presented to him over the past year.” As a result, Governor Ehrlich, in coordination with Secretary McCabe, promoted him to the position of Deputy Secretary of Operations for DHR.

During a press conference held on Friday, September 17 at the Saratoga State Center, Mr. Blair spoke of his joy at being given the opportunity to continue to support Baltimore City and the 23 other departments of social service from his new statewide position. “I love what I do in Baltimore City DSS. I come every day with an enthusiasm for the work. I never looked at the city as a negative. What we do every day is important. We stand for those people who are ‘the least, the last and the lost.’ We have made some real progress with the help of the staff and the community. We have put into place some initiatives that can be transferred to other local departments as they strive to improve their programs and service delivery,” said Blair.

“Floyd Blair has a proven track record of leadership in serving our most vulnerable children,” said Governor Robert L. Ehrlich Jr.. “His impressive background and experience as an administrator, lawyer, minister and Navy veteran, and his many accomplishments in the



DHR Employee Jill Taylor Receives *National Angels in Adoption Award*

Congressman Ben Cardin Nominates Jill as one of this year's nationally recognized Angels in Adoption.

DHR is pleased to announce that Jill Taylor of DHR's Adoption Unit was nominated by U.S. Representative Ben Cardin to receive this year's *Angels in Adoption Award*, awarded to 165 adoption advocates from across the U.S. With this award, Jill has been recognized for her 16 years' dedication and commitment to helping children find permanent, loving homes in Maryland.

"Jill Taylor has been a dedicated activist on behalf of hundreds of adopted children and their families," says Congressman Cardin. "She has spent many years working in the field of adoption, including helping to streamline and reform the entire process. She is a strong advocate for children and their families and she has also been active in helping reunite adult adoptees with their biological families."

Jill started working in adoption at the Baltimore City Department of Social Services in February 1988. She came to DHR in November of 2000 and currently works in DHR's Adoption Search, Contact and Reunion Services program, helping to reunite adult adoptees with their birth parents, as well as in DHR's adoption subsidies program.

Jill was drawn to working in adoption from a young age. "Adoption was a part of my family experience as I had cousins who were adopted. I grew up hearing their stories, and I thought adoption was a wonderful way to build a family," she says.

"Jill has a great rapport with children, adult adoptees and families," said Secretary Christopher J. McCabe. "It takes a special type of person to devote their time and energies to assist children and families. Jill's passion for building 'Forever Families' through adoption has helped her to successfully accomplish that feat for so many families."

When Jill worked as a social worker at BCDSS, bringing adoptive families together, she became intimately involved with those families, making sure to match the right children with the right parents. Making adoptions happen is a passion and a priority for her. "Children in the state system desperately need families," she says. "We all need family, it does not matter how old you are."

Jill received the *Angels in Adoption Award* September 23rd at the Senate Dirksen Building, and participated in a gala celebration at the Ronald Reagan Building in Washington, DC the same evening. The events were organized by the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute.

DHR Launches of Phase 1 of MD CHESSIE System

The Administration announced in early October that 11 jurisdictions (Allegany County, Baltimore City, Calvert County, Cecil County, Charles County, Frederick County, Kent County, Prince George's County, Queen Anne's County, St. Mary's County, Wicomico County,) will roll-out a limited version of the MD CHESSIE (Maryland Children Electronic Social Services Information Exchange) computer intake and referral module starting in December.



CHESSIE supports case managers with information that will enhance the effectiveness of their daily activities of protecting children and preserving families. This computer-based system will be available on the desktop of child welfare workers so they can access critical case information. This system, when fully operational, will meet federal standards.

This initial module will include comprehensive referral and screening functions for Child Protective Services (CPS) referrals, Non-CPS referrals, information and referral documentation, and CPS history clearance referrals. "The launch represents added value to the work already being done in local departments. The first phase of CHESSIE moves us toward the 21st century's tool that our child welfare staff need and deserve," said Secretary McCabe.

The early release will accomplish the following:

- Prepare users for the full implementation of CHESSIE by becoming familiar with the "look and feel" of the application.
- Create local department CHESSIE experts and local support networks.
- Allow the early collection of data for program review, outcome measures and policy revisions.
- Produce "lessons learned" to be used in preparation for the Statewide rollout.

Children Needing Adoption Met Prospective Parents for a Fun-Filled Day at the Beach

29 Teenagers, Sibling Groups, and Children with Special Physical and/or Mental Health Needs Seek Matches for Homes From Among 40 Families

On a Friday in late summer, 29 children who needed adoptive homes and 40 families looking to adopt met at Kurtz's Beach on the Chesapeake Bay for an exciting day of fun, games and prospective adoptive pairings. Prospective parents who are trying to adopt had a chance to see the children in a relaxed, festive atmosphere, as they enjoyed clowns, rides and entertainment.

The event was hosted by the Greater Severna Park Rotary Club, the Maryland Department of Human Resources, and the Metro Area Adoption Committee, which consists of adoption and foster care workers representing 12 counties from across the State that have teamed up to bring the children and families together.

"This is a great partnership for DHR," says Christopher J. McCabe, Secretary of DHR. "This was a day for the children to get outdoors and have a good time, and to show several interested families from across Maryland that there are wonderful children in the State's custody in need of stable, permanent, loving homes."



The Greater Severna Park Rotary Club has been the major driving force behind this event. The Rotary decided to sponsor an adoption event as part of the Rotary International's Centennial Anniversary.

"We are very proud that we can bring children, families, social workers, and community members together to make matches between adoptive families and children who are waiting for homes," says Gordon Smith, Past-President of the Greater Severna Park Rotary Club.

Continued from page 1

The group identified and discussed accomplishments in the areas of customer, staff, processes, and infrastructure. The group also looked at the current environment by identifying trends, customer needs, technological needs, political factors, and uncertainties. The executive directors of the central administrations as well as Budget and Finance and Office of Technology and Human Services gave a brief overview of their top initiatives.

“The time is critical and right for re-thinking, re-organizing and re-prioritizing human service programs. I have stressed the value of being ‘transparent’ at DHR – that is owning up to the challenges, problems, and any weaknesses of our current systems, in order to lay the foundation for significant change. The time is right, the need is there and the challenge of raising the bar for child welfare is great,” said Secretary McCabe.

Help is Available for Energy Bills

DO YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW NEED HELP PAYING HOME ENERGY BILLS?

The Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP) can help! OHEP is a year round program which helps needy households afford their home energy bills.

HOW DOES OHEP HELP HOUSEHOLDS AFFORD THEIR HOME ENERGY BILLS?

The Maryland Energy Assistance Program (MEAP) provides heating assistance grants to fuel suppliers and utility companies on behalf of eligible applicants, while the Electric Universal Service Program (EUSP) provides assistance with electric bills whether for cooling or heating needs. In certain instances both MEAP and EUSP can assist customers in weatherizing their home (e.g., insulation, furnace repair, window replacement, etc.). WE STRONGLY ENCOURAGE HOUSEHOLDS TO MAKE APPLICATION BEFORE A CRISIS OCCURS.

HOW CAN I FIND OUT IF MY HOUSEHOLD QUALIFIES?

OHEP can also be contacted via the DHR Call Center at 1 (800) 352 1446 or via the Internet at www.dhr.state.md.us/meap.



Your Home Energy Partner

Prince George's & Anne Arundel Child Support Amnesty Program Collected \$168,000 in Arrears

Maryland Department of Human Resources Calls Effort to Collect Money from Delinquent Parents a 'Major Success'

Baltimore, MD – Hundreds of non-custodial parents in Prince George's and Anne Arundel counties took advantage of an opportunity to resolve child support arrears without fear of arrest or prosecution through an Amnesty Program earlier this month.

From August 2 through August 14, 689 non-custodial parents responded to the call to help financially support their children in Prince George's County, and 137 parents responded in Anne Arundel County. A total of \$168,027 was collected — \$137,173 of that coming from Prince George's County.

"Many parents who have fallen behind on their obligation to financially support their children made a move in the right direction during that two-week period," said Governor Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr. "These parents came forward and began to live up to their responsibilities, and their children will benefit immensely."

"The Amnesty Program provided a great chance to come forward and negotiate good faith settlements, and get back on track with child support obligations."

The Child Support Amnesty program was coordinated by The Anne Arundel County Office of Child Support Enforcement, the Anne Arundel County Sheriff's Office, the Prince George's County Office of Child Support Enforcement and the Prince George's County Sheriff's Office.

"This program worked, but we still have major work to do," said Christopher J. McCabe, Secretary of DHR. "Parents who are not paying child support have children who need food, clothes, housing and education. The Amnesty Program provided a great chance for them to come forward and negotiate good faith settlements, and get back on track with their child support obligations."

Brian Shea, Executive Director of DHR's Child Support Enforcement Administration, called the program a major success. "Throughout the year, we aggressively pursue delinquent parents through professional license suspensions, earnings withholdings, bank account seizures, and other methods," he said. "This Amnesty Program gives people a chance to do the right thing, take care of business, and take care of their children."

Prince George's County DSS' Faith Based Community Outreach Initiatives Program Yields Strong Community Partnerships

The Prince George's County Department of Social Services' Faith Based Community Outreach Initiatives Program provides needed and vital information to more than 200 faith entities throughout the year in Prince George's County. The Faith Based Community Outreach Initiatives Program operates on the theme: "Together Everyone Accomplishes More." The program is a network not only of faith entities and the Prince George's Department of Social Services, but also one that includes representatives from the Police Department, the Department of Health, and the Prince George's State's Attorney, as well as business entities.

The original faith-based initiative from Prince George's County Department of Social Services was started in 1995 as a response to the Welfare to Work Federal legislation. It was called Project AWARE — Awareness of Welfare Reform and Reaching Everyone. Faith entities felt that they needed to be prepared to handle the inquiries of individuals when services were altered. The program was started by two pastors in Prince George's County with the Department of Social Services as a participant. In 1999, the Prince George's County Department of Social Services decided to fund a part-time coordinator of this effort under federal Family Investment monies. In 2001, Virginia Beauchamp became that part-time coordinator. The other co-chair is L'Tanya Brown who works in Eviction Prevention under Housing and Homeless Services. In 2004, the Community Services Division of the Department of Social Services combined the efforts of Project AWARE with the Continuum of Care (Housing and Homeless Services) Faith Based Initiatives, and today they are called the Prince George's County Faith Based Community Outreach Initiative.

Karyn T. Lynch, Director of the Prince George's County Department of Social Services, applauds the growth and success of the partnership. "The Department is eager to connect with our faith-based partners to ensure all of our citizens and residents are better served with the resources and services they need to live more independent and productive lives," said Ms. Lynch. To develop their partners, staff identified over 800 faith entities in the county. They then surveyed the group twice to invite them to participate in the network. Initially, over 250 responded positively and the network continues to grow.

"Our collective goal is to make a difference in the many communities we serve,"

During 2003-2004, twelve informational bulletins were distributed to participating faith-based partners. The topics included: Energy/Utility Assistance; Housing and Homeless Services; Family Investment Services—Food Stamps, Purchase of Child Care, Temporary Emergency Medical and Housing Assistance, Temporary Cash Assistance and Emergency Assistance; Medical Assistance; Health Coverage for Children; Eviction Prevention Program Services; Family Crisis Center, and Emergency Food Pan-

tries. In addition, two “Best Practices” meetings were held to brief members in the partnership on the services of Catholic Charities and LARS (Laurel Advocacy and Referral Services).

The information for bulletins is derived from the steering committee member efforts — the Department of Social Services, efforts of the Prince George’s County Police Department, the Office of the State’s Attorney, the Health Department, etc.

The program successfully operates using electronic mail as the preferred communication tool. Faith entities are encouraged to collect copies of bulletins for parishioners who may need resources in the future. Recently, Patricia Herbert, Head of the Domestic Violence Unit for the State’s Attorney, disseminated “Domestic Violence Safety Planning Tips” following a seminar. The program seems to be working. Dr. Jimmy Painter, pastor of Cresthill Baptist Church in Laurel, writes, “Thank you so much for sending this wealth of information my way. It will help me and our leadership as well as membership become better equipped to minister to the needs we meet in both our congregation and in our community,” said Dr. Painter.

Father George Golden, pastor of Mount Calvary Catholic Church in Forestville, writes: “Thank you for the reminder about the energy assistance program. I have enjoyed learning about what’s going on through your e-mails and pass on the information to the people here at Mount Calvary Catholic Church,” said Father Golden. “I want to take time to tell you how helpful your work is to people like me in the field, as it were. God bless you,” added Father Golden.

Through quarterly “Best Practices” meetings and continued e-mail and regular mailings of the bulletins, the program will continue to share timely information with faith-based partners so they may help members obtain needed resources and available services. Because “Together Everyone Accomplishes More in Prince George’s County!”

For additional information, contact Ginny Beauchamp and L’Tanya Brown - care of Prince George’s County Department of Social Service at 301-909-6320 or VBeauchamp@dhr.state.md.us. 805 Brightseat Rd, Landover, Md. 20785.

LT. GOVERNOR STEELE ANNOUNCED PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN BALTIMORE DSS AND STOP, SHOP AND SAVE

Lt. Governor Michael S. Steele, Secretary Christopher J. McCabe, and Deputy Secretary of Operations Floyd R. Blair joined Henry T. Baines, the owner of Stop, Shop and Save, to announce a partnership between the city DSS and the nine Stop, Shop and Save locations.

Some 100 people transitioning from welfare will become employed with Stop, Shop and Save. They will receive on-the-job training. The cost of the training will be offset via a grant diversion program which re-directs the workers Temporary Cash Assistance payments into wages.

“This partnership is one of the many we have utilized in an effort to move families off of the welfare rolls and into work,” said Lt. Governor Steele.

“We are creating jobs in the communities where recipients live and are helping them to make positive differences in their lives and in their neighborhoods. We are grateful for partners like Reverend Baines who are committed to helping us make a difference for others.”



HOWARD COUNTY DSS' HARD WORK PAYS OFF!

Federal Agency Confirms Compliance with LEP Policy

The Howard County Department of Social Services received the final report from the Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Civil Rights, for the Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Policy audit that was conducted in July 2004. The audit review found that the steps the agency has taken to ensure that LEP customers are afforded meaningful access to the programs administered by the agency are in compliance with federal regulations. This is demonstrated by written policies and procedures and a system for providing language assistance. Through the use of bilingual employees, contract interpreters, and community resources, LEP customers in Howard County are provided language assistance whenever necessary. In order to further strengthen our ability to assist LEP customers, the staff have been taking ongoing mini-courses in "command Spanish" in partnership with Howard County Community College.

Much hard work went into the development and continued refinement of policies and practices. Howard County should be congratulated on a **"job well done!"**

ALLEGANY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

Invites You to C.A.R.E

On October 2, 2004, Allegany County DSS partnered with Martins Food to host an event titled Community Awareness, Resources, Et cetera in the parking lot of Martins Food in Cumberland. Information was shared with the public about agency programs highlighting the Family Preservation and the Foster Care and Adoption Programs. Martins Food Associates also participated by selling hot dogs and soda, with the proceeds benefiting the Western Maryland Food Bank. The Associates also sold autumn themed items, with those proceeds benefiting the Children's Miracle Network.

Other agencies from the Allegany County community were represented at the outdoor event that featured a DJ's entertainment and Martins Food gift card giveaways. This event was a celebration of new agency outpost sites located in the South Cumberland area that will provide an opportunity for collaboration with community members, South Cumberland Associations and resource providers.

At this time, customers do not go into these outpost sites for services, but in the future they are hoping to be able to do some interviewing, visitation, and group meetings. They are also starting to investigate outposting other services such as Family Investment and Child Support. They have found that with our outposted sites the agency has built a stronger connection with their Community Partners.

Through neighborhood outreach events the agency hopes to raise awareness of the need for foster and adoptive families as well as all service areas as part of the Department's work for the safety and stability of all families.

Red Cross Certifies St. Mary's County Staff



Recently 15 staff members of the St. Mary's County Department of Social Services completed Red Cross training certifying them in Disaster Services, Mass Care and Shelter Simulation.

Social Services employee staffed 4 shelters when Tropical Storm Isabel came ashore in September '03. On August 14, 2004, staff members were once again called upon to staff 2 local shelters for Tropical Storm Charley. Eager to know more about disaster operations, the agency requested training from the Southern Maryland Chapter of the American Red Cross.

Cecil County DSS WAG & IDA programs help customer purchase car and Home

The Cecil County Department of Social Services' Family Investment Assessment Board recently issued a Welfare Avoidance Grant (WAG) in the amount of \$4,512 to Chantel Phillips. Ms. Phillips used the WAG funding for a down payment on a 2004 Chevrolet Aveo from Williams Chevrolet in Elkton. Prior to moving into her home purchased through the Cecil County IDA program, Ms. Phillips walked to work. Now that her new home is well beyond walking distance, Ms. Phillips will use this car to commute to her full-time job at Union Hospital and part-time job at Matthew's Hallmark.

A WAG is a non-recurrent, short-term cash benefit to a family with children, which is paid based on an agreement signed by the applicant or recipient and the local department.

Individual Development Account (IDA) funds help low income working individuals and families to save money to buy a first home, start a business or for post secondary education.